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## HENRI BEUCHAT

By C. M. BARBEAU

THE forlorn hope that some of the lost members of the ill-fated Canadian Arctic Expedition might reappear has long been abandoned and it is with regret that we here record the presumed death of Henri Beuchat, one of the two ethnologists of the expedition.

Although still a young man, whose career lay more in the future than in the past, M. Beuchat had deservedly won a high reputation as an anthropologist. In him American archeology and ethnology lose one of their most brilliant European exponents. We are indebted to Madame M. Hollebecque, of Paris (France), for much of the following biographical material.

If M. Beuchat's personality and achievements were to be characterized in a few words, we would describe him as a modest and most brilliant self-made man of science, who by sheer determination and talent acquired a vast and critical knowledge of many subjects and achieved success in the face of adverse circumstances.

Born in Paris, in 1878, his school education came to a premature end when he was only thirteen years of age. His naïve but keen interest in books then determined his choice of a calling; and he became a compositor in a Paris printing office. At the age of eighteen the death of his father and his responsibility for the welfare of his family induced him to accept the more remunerative position of accountant in a business concern. His military training was next undergone in his twenty-second year. Bent as he was to become a man of learning, these years of early assiduous manual labor, although somewhat impairing his health, were not without benefit for him. All his spare moments were devoted to his many-sided hobby: books, museums, and lectures. In the printing office he developed the technical qualities of neatness and precision, and his skill as a draughtsman, which enabled him later to provide his



HENRI BEUCHAT

own manuscripts or publications with maps and engravings from his own hand. On the very subject of the printer's types his curious and searching mind soon began to speculate. He thus undertook a minute study of the history of printing and writing generally. Other symbols and methods of writing also appealed to the young typographer; and his greatest enjoyment, when he was a mere adolescent, consisted in deciphering hieroglyphic, cuneiform, Syriac and Nagari characters and alphabets, and compiling such data in notebooks. Through the subsequent changes in his life he remained interested in this study, which later embraced that of the Mexican and Central American systems. In later years he was still gathering materials and fondly elaborating a plan for a forthcoming work on 'writing' (*L'Ecriture*). This hobby led him into the study of living languages. While he was giving French lessons to Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and other students in Paris, he was repaid by lessons in their own languages. From this starting point his curiosity and power of assimilation embraced many other languages, including those of Central and South American tribes.

A certain modification in his lines of interest followed his passage from the printing to the business offices. The business drudgery gave life, in his imagination, to figures, formulae, and calculation. After he had mastered the elements of mathematics, his attention gradually turned to astronomy and chemistry. It is, indeed, astonishing that a self-made scholar, even when gifted with unsurpassed memory and judgment, should not have lost his bearings in the midst of such diversified subjects. Where others are usually submerged, however, he was building and storing for the future. Mere facts were interesting to him only as related to others; and instead of being stored pell-mell in his brain they were assimilated and classified. This explains how he developed into a type of scientist that has well nigh disappeared now, and won distinction in fields of science quite divorced from his own anthropological research. Thus, in 1913, he won the '*Prix des Dames*' in astronomy, for his many services since 1894 in attending and directing the weekly meetings of the Société Astronomique de Paris. And, as a pastime,

he was annotating and correcting Mendeleyeff's data on chemistry, and preparing a scientific novel entitled *Les Cristaux*, in which he was embodying several of his philosophic ideas and hypotheses.

Notwithstanding the exclusiveness of the Paris academic and scientific circles, the reputation of young Beuchat began to spread in many quarters, and won him the favors and protection of many noted personalities, notably the Duc de Loubat, la générale Bocher, M. le Souëf, and Léon de Rosny. In 1902 he became *élève titulaire* at the Section des Hautes Etudes, La Sorbonne; and he assimilated in his own way the anthropological views and methods of the Durkheim school, especially under the guidance of his esteemed masters and friends, MM. Mauss, Hubert, and others. Lack of space here forbids the detailed account of his arduous and trying career as anthropologist in Paris. While he was stubbornly pursuing his own researches on American archeology and ethnology, his energy was often taxed to the utmost by his professional duties and many tasks of secondary importance. In 1902-3 he became the secretary-treasurer of *La Revue des Etudes Américaines*, and was entrusted by M. le Souëf with the preparation of a lengthy illustrated manuscript on Mexican art. After receiving a diploma at the Ecole du Louvre, he was appointed secretary of *La Revue de Paris*. The university ruts and regulations barring him from a university function, for which he was otherwise qualified, forced him to accept an insufficiently remunerative post in the Fine Arts Department of the French Government. In this capacity he had to attend to exacting drudgery in connection with the administration and classification of the ancient monuments of France. Other irksome tasks also consumed much of his time, such as the preparation of maps showing the distribution of racial and cultural elements in America for the Musée de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the restoration of the Marquesas islands hall in the Louvre, and the translation, in 1912, of Nordenskiöld's work on the Gran Chaco Indians (*La vie des Indiens au Grand Chaco*, Paris, Delagrave).

Although only at the beginning of his productive career as an Americanist, his versatility, clarity of ideas, and creative talent are shown in his essays, reviews, and works, the principal of which

is the remarkable and unique *Manuel d'Archéologie Américaine* (Paris, Picard, XLI, 773 pp., 1913), the only ambitious classificatory work on American archeology in its wider sense yet attempted.

The bibliography of his publications is the following:—

In the *Revue des Etudes Américaines* (1902): 'Notice sur quelques manuscrits mexicains de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris'; and 'Notice analytique sur les travaux de Lord Kingsborough' on Mexican antiquities. (1903): 'Les peuples Chahta-Maskokis' (Jan.); 'Quelques traditions des Eskimos de l'Alaska' (April); 'Quelques légendes des Eskimos de la terre de Baffin' (July); 'Le mythe de Sedna chez les Eskimos du centre' (Nov.).

In *L'année Sociologique* (1904-5) he collaborated with M. Mauss in an important study on the social morphology of the Eskimo, entitled 'Essai sur les variations saisonnières des Eskimos (pp. 40-132).

To *L'Anthropologie* he contributed a number of reviews (1905-13) on the works of W J McGee, Mauss, Steensby, E. de Jonghe, Nuttall, Speck, Berloni, and others.

In collaboration with Dr. P. Rivet he published several linguistic papers, namely: 1, 'Contribution à l'étude des langues Colorado et Cayapa (Equateur)' (in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, t. IV, 1907); 2, 'La famille linguistique Záparo' (*ibid.*, t. IV, 1908, fasc. 2); 3, 'La langue Jíbaro ou Šiwora' (in *Anthropos*, IV, 1909; V, 1910); 4, 'Affinités des langues indigènes du sud de la Colombie et du nord de l'Equateur' (Paniquita, Coconuco et Barbacoa) (in *Muséon*, 1910); 5, 'La famille Betoya ou Tucano' (in *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*, t. XVII, 1911).

In the *Revue d'Archéologie* (1911) he published a study on the present knowledge of the 'Manuscrits indigènes de l'ancien Mexique,' which he later completed in his article on 'L'Ecriture Maya' (in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris* (1913)).

In 1911 he collaborated with Mme. M. Hollebecque in the preparation of a small handbook on the origin and nature of religious phenomena, *Les Religions, Etude historique et sociologique du phénomène religieux* (Paris, M. Rivière).

The premature end of his career leaves many important studies

and works unfinished. More than 5000 slips, representing many years of work, had been compiled, prepared, and sorted, and the plan arranged for a voluminous sequel to his *Manuel d'Archéologie Américaine*, entitled *Peuplades Sauvages de l'Amérique*. In collaboration with MM. Lahy, Chaillié, and Mme. Hollebecque, he was also compiling materials for an exhaustive study of the *Mythes de la Création*, in the various parts of the world.

When, in the spring of 1913, he was invited to join the Canadian Arctic Expedition, his decision was instantaneous. We are told by his mother that this "was the first great joy of his life." Fond of seeing things with his own eyes, he wanted to live among the peoples with whom his imagination had dwelt for so long. The fragmentary evidence of books and museums was no longer sufficient; and he had long felt the call of living realities. Some of his La Sorbonne friends, in fact, wished, in 1909, that an expedition might be organized enabling him to complete in the field his Eskimo studies. Fate, however, seemed to be against him, and he many times despaired of ever getting away from libraries, museums, and the exacting trivialities of his Parisian environment. The opportunity of joining the Canadian Arctic Expedition, although practically devoid of any material compensation, appeared to him as a unique chance of emancipation. His mother, to the support and love of whom he had pledged his life, was glad for him, although heart-broken. In a recent letter she wrote: ". . . Life had never yielded him the happiness which he deserved; and I was hoping for his future." When he joined the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada, his new friends enjoyed the charm of his companionship and brilliant conversation. Everyone was impressed with the extent and soundness of his science. Jenness, his companion ethnologist, wrote from Nome (Alaska) ". . . Beuchat is an absolute encyclopedia of knowledge. He has already been christened 'professor.' And he is a most delightful companion . . . ." Jenness, an Oxford University graduate, did not seem to suspect that his highly deserved eulogy was addressed to a humble Paris typographer, accountant, secretary, proof-reader, and government employee, who in spite of all burdens

and odds had achieved learning. His friend Chaillié, a French scientist, wrote of him: "His quality of self-made man (*autodidacte*) was what we liked him for. Besides his reading and prodigious memory, he had imbibed much experience in varied stations in life, whence his emotional and intellectual faculties had derived precious gifts . . . ."

But where he was sure to find the realization of his dreams and the enjoyment of a world of actualities, he was unfortunate enough to meet, at the age of thirty-five, the fate of so many polar explorers. All those who knew him mourn today the loss of a friend and Americanist in whom they had placed the most sanguine hopes. When the news of his presumed death was last summer broken to his mother, it was feared that she could not withstand the shock. She showed herself, however, as heroic as many had known her to be and she finally said: "I have lost everything. But I won't give up life yet. Our epoch of gigantic struggles is worth living through." And more recently she wrote: "I feel in my heart that my sorrow would be less bitter if I were told that the loss of my only son has been a sacrifice to science."

ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIVISION,  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, OTTAWA